

DCI/NIC Conference - NIO/Africa, 6 February 1985

SUDAN/ETHIOPIA: Refugee Situation

Refugees, primarily from the Tigre region of Ethiopia, continue to enter Sudan at the rate of over 3,000 per day. Over 120,000 new refugees have entered Sudan in the last few months, and reliable sources indicate another 150,000 people are en route from Ethiopia to Sudanese camps. The unexpected rate of growth of the refugees numbers, plus snafus among donors and the Sudan government, has created tragically high death rates at the hastily created reception camps just inside Sudan. Lack of sufficient food, water, health care and shelter is responsible for death rates in the hundreds per day. A measles epidemic is spreading in the camps with devastating effects among children. Despite urgent US and private efforts, food, water and medicine supplies have not caught up to demand, and Western European donors have not yet weighed in with major contributions. The potential for catastrophic death rates remains high for the next several months.

Meanwhile, an increase in the sending of foodstuffs cross-border from Sudan into Ethiopia, which is planned by the US, ICRC and PVOs, will likely trigger an Ethiopian government response. The Mengistu regime in recent days has denounced such shipments as aid to rebels and has publicly warned Sudan that Addis Ababa will "defend its borders." On 30 January Ethiopian leader Mengistu lectured UN Relief Coordinator Jansson on this and refused to consider any new initiatives on getting food into northern Ethiopia. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] increased shipment of cross-border food into rebel-controlled areas likely will provoke an Ethiopian response. In my view, the response could begin as air strikes on food supply and refugee trucks, but could then escalate into an attack on Sudanese refugee camps perhaps on a parallel with the situation in Afghanistan/Pakistan.

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